



Becky Bolton Crisswell

Crisswell's affinity for clay began early in life when her Mother handed her some modeling clay to work with at the age of three, and she has taken it from there. Those little clay bird's nests and backyard mud pies satisfied some strong and curious avenues that eventually led to her explorations for over thirty-five years in clay, glazes, throwing, sculpting, kiln firing and the marketing of her clay works.

Crisswell, mostly self-studied and self-taught in clay, was fortunate to be a student of Mary Charles Painter at Vestavia Hills High School. At that time in 1972-73 the artists-in-residence program sent Bill Nance to her school. He introduced her to the wheel throwing process and was impressed by her immediate success with it. During her freshman year of college at the University of Montevallo, Crisswell was still struggling to find a path that would bring satisfaction in a career. Her love of science and art were equal and inseparable. As she pursued her science degree she was being introduced to more and more art. During her two years attending the University of Montevallo, 1973-1975, Ted Metz and John Spicer were supportive of her natural artistic abilities and influential in her decision to choose art over science as a career move. At the end of the summer of 1975, Crisswell became ill with mononucleosis and had to drop out of college temporarily to recover. Returning to college at the University of Alabama in the fall of 1976 she joined New College to receive an interdisciplinary degree that would better combine science and art. There the ceramics professor, Frank Engle, also became aware of Crisswell's innate understanding of clay and her self-motivated approach, so he basically stepped aside and let her go by providing her with materials and equipment. This freedom and self-motivation are what Crisswell thrives on still today as she continues working in clay on her own.

Her interest in clay and the ceramic process have been a never-ending source of fascination and exploration for Crisswell. She has at one time spent weeks on porcelain figure sculpture and then come back to her wheel thrown work with new ideas of folded clay sculpting applied to a thrown piece which she calls her "corsage pieces". The combined sculpting and wheel thrown works have also evolved into Crisswell's collectable "clay folk" jars. Another extensive area of study has been with paper-relief and porcelain slip design. These design surfaces can be very geometrical or loosely ornate, with either white or black slip applications. Crisswell also has developed a method of porcelain slip decoration by simply drawing into it free hand with a pencil to create her ever-popular "swimming fish" motif. Important to Crisswell's wheel-thrown clay artwork are graceful forms with artistic surface considerations - most involving utility into art. Her well known triple coated glazes give a rich cobalt blue color, patterned with crystalline bursts and textures derived from the interaction of several glaze components, including rutile and gerstley borate.

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